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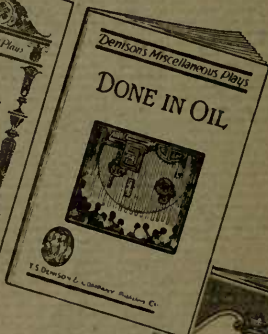
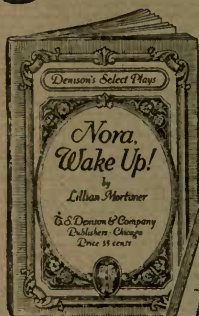
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BY WAY OF THE SECRET PASSAGE

A COMEDY-DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

BY
LINDSEY BARBEE

AUTHOR OF

*"All on a Summer's Day," "After the Game," "The Dream That Came
True," "The Kingdom of Heart's Content," "The
Thread of Destiny," Etc.*



CHICAGO
T. S. DENISON & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

BY WAY OF THE SECRET PASSAGE

CHARACTERS.

MRS. SHERMAN.....	<i>The Hostess</i>
BETTY DREW	<i>Her Niece</i>
RUTH.. }	<i>House Guests of Mrs. Sherman</i>
RITA... }	
ALICE.. }	
HANNAH	<i>A Maid</i>
MADAME DREW.....	<i>Of Revolutionary Days</i>
ANNETTE.... }	<i>Her Daughters</i>
CAROLINE... }	
ELIZABETH.. }	
WENONAH	<i>An Indian Maid</i>
JOHN HARVEY.....	<i>Of the Patriot Army</i>

NOTE.—The character of John Harvey can easily be assumed by a girl, if it is not desirable to have a man in the cast.

SCENE—*Just Out of Trenton, New Jersey.*

TIME—*The Present.*

TIME OF PLAYING—*About One and Three-quarter Hours.*

- ACT I. Hannah's story. Christmas night.
ACT II. Rita's dream. Christmas night, 1776.
ACT III. Betty's Surprise. The day after Christmas.
-

SETTING—*The living room in the Drew home.*

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SYNOPSIS FOR PROGRAM.

ACT I.—Betty's engagement dance on Christmas night proves a great success and many discussions follow as the girls chat over their chocolate. The relics of the Drew home and its historic associations prove of never-failing interest to the members of the house party, for Mrs. Sherman and Betty have many anecdotes and traditions to relate. Rita rejoices in the fact that the house has both a ghost and a secret passage. The portrait of Mrs. Elizabeth Drew, Betty's great-great-grandmother, excites much admiration. Hannah, a trusty servant of the house, tells the story of Mistress Elizabeth's romantic career and declares that on every Christmas night the ghosts of the happy pair haunt the very room in which they are sitting. Rita begs to spend the night in the haunted room, but is laughingly escorted to her own bed as sleepy goodnights are said. When all is quiet, Rita, lighted by "Lafayette's candle," appears again and after gazing fearfully about her, cuddles into the big chair and dreams a dream.

ACT II. *Scene I.*—The Christmas dance ends with a heated argument in which Mistress Elizabeth stands her ground. Wenonah brings a message and John Harvey gains an interview with his lady love. His secret mission is made known to Mistress Elizabeth and the marked chart is put into her hands. Shots, pursuit and the secret passage.

Scene II.—Where is Elizabeth? Many answers to the question. The mysterious tapping. Elizabeth makes a dramatic entrance and brings astounding news.

ACT III.—"And then—I awoke!" The girls urge Rita to test the revelation of the dream by showing them the secret passage. "Not till Betty comes!" Betty's puzzling absence is discussed. Another mysterious tapping. Rita touches the spring and the panel slides back. "He's waiting for me—at the end of the secret passage!"

STORY OF THE PLAY.

Rita, Alice and Ruth are house guests of Mrs. Sherman and her niece Betty in their home near Trenton, a Revolutionary mansion with many attendant traditions. It is Christmas night and all have returned from a Christmas dance given in honor of Betty's engagement to a young army officer who is spending his holidays in Trenton while waiting for his commission. After the usual desultory conversation which follows in the wake of a Christmas festivity, Rita roams restlessly around the room, admiring and commenting upon many interesting and historic things. The questions concerning the family portraits are answered by Mrs. Sherman and Betty, with many anecdotes and traditions, and Rita, charmed by the atmosphere of the place, declares that all it needs to make it quite perfect is a ghost and a secret passage. Mrs. Sherman laughingly asserts that both ghost and secret passage are included in the family associations and calls upon an old family servant for a "story." Hannah tells the story of a Christmas night in '76 when a certain Elizabeth Drew, a loyal little patriot in the midst of a staunch Tory family, aided and abetted Washington's army in its sudden descent upon the Hessians at Trenton. For—the story went—her lover was with the patriot army, and on this historic night she not only effected his escape by means of the secret passage, but also carried an important message to headquarters—and subsequently married him. Wherefore—according to tradition—each Christmas night the ghosts of the happy pair walk and talk together in this very room, and may be seen by those who have the inner eye. Rita begs to sleep in the "haunted room," but Mrs. Sherman laughingly objects, and Betty refuses to reveal the whereabouts of the secret passage until the morrow. After all have retired, Rita steals into the room, curls up in the big chair, prepares to keep vigil and—falls asleep.

Her dream is portrayed in the second act. Mistress Elizabeth's defiant defence of the patriot cause; the stolen interview with her lover; his discovery and his flight by the

secret passage; her sudden decision to carry the message to headquarters and its dramatic consequences, all come to Rita in slumberland, and when the morning comes she tells her thrilling story. Betty has been called into the city by a mysterious telephone message and Rita absolutely refuses to reveal the secret passage until her return. All of a sudden a faint tapping is heard, a tapping which, upon investigation, seems to come from beyond the wall. Rita touches the spring and the panel slides back revealing Betty, flushed and excited. After a storm of questions she gives the following account of her movements. By appointment she has met her soldier lover for a morning ride. She finds he has received his commission, and, yielding to his urgent pleas, marries him. Like Elizabeth of old, she decides to bring the news by way of the secret passage.

CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES.

MRS. SHERMAN—Vivacious, thoroughly up to date.

RUTH, RITA, ALICE—Typically modern in every respect.

All wear elaborate evening gowns and coats in first act. Simple morning gowns in last act.

BETTY DREW—Bright, audacious, full of life. She wears an evening gown in the first act, a riding suit in the last.

HANNAH—Quiet and dignified. She wears conventional maid's costume with white apron. She should be middle-aged in appearance.

MADAME DREW—Haughty and imperious.

ANNETTE AND CAROLINE—Argumentative and self-assertive.

All wear evening gowns of the time of the Revolution in Scene I. Morning gowns of the same period in Scene II.

ELIZABETH—Quick in repartee, self-willed, a trifle defiant but altogether charming. She wears quaint and elaborate evening gown, with long dark coat in Scene II.

JOHN HARVEY—Earnest, impulsive and enthusiastic. He wears long military coat, soft hat and high boots.

WENONAH—Stolid, slow of speech. Wears the Indian garb of those days.

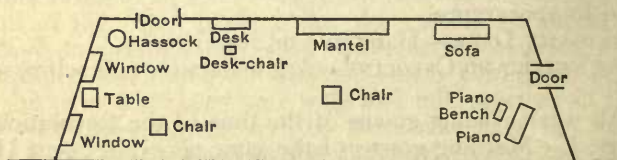
PROPERTIES.

ACT I—Grand piano and piano bench with rug; music for piano. Colonial sofa; two colonial chairs; colonial table with old-fashioned mirror above; hassock; old-fashioned desk and chair; three large oil paintings, two of women in old-fashioned costumes, one of a man in colonial dress; two brass candlesticks with candles, matches, bric-a-brac, books, etc., for mantel; andirons, hearth set and simulated fire for fireplace; vase of flowers for table; rugs, drapes, curtains; pillows for sofa; switch for electric lights; call button; sliding panel. Evening coats and dance programs for Mrs. Sherman and the girls. Engagement ring for Betty. Tea cart, chocolate pot, cups and saucers, napkins for Hannah. Christmas greens and mistletoe if desired.

ACT II—Candelabra and lamps for piano and table; two candlesticks with lighted candles for mantel; old-fashioned curtains for windows; old-fashioned piano if possible; evening cloaks, gloves, etc., for Madame Drew and her daughters. Slouch hat and paper for John. Long dark coat for Elizabeth. Sewing for Madame Drew.

ACT III—Embroidery for Ruth. Duster for Hannah. Wedding ring and riding crop for Betty.

SCENE PLOT.



STAGE DIRECTIONS.

R. means right of stage; *C.*, center; *R. C.*, right center; *L.*, left; *U. E.*, upper entrance; *2 E.*, lower entrance, etc.; *D. F.*, door in flat or scene running across the back of the stage; up stage, away from footlights; down stage, near footlights. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

BY WAY OF THE SECRET PASSAGE

ACT I.

SCENE: *Living room in the Drew home. Full stage. Large door R. of C. in F., revealing hall beyond with wainscot backing. Practical door L. U. E. Windows R. U. E. and R. 2 E. Mantel and open fireplace with andirons; hearth set, etc., at C. in F. Desk and desk chair R. of mantel. Sofa L. of mantel. Grand piano and piano bench covered with Oriental rug, L. 2 E. Table between windows with old-fashioned mirror above. Large chair at C. and at R. 2 E. Hassock at R. U. E. Large gold-framed paintings above the desk, the mantel and the sofa. Handsome rugs, curtains and drapes. Books, bric-a-brac and two brass candlesticks with candles for mantel. Pillows for sofa. Vase of flowers for table. Music for piano. Simulated fire for grate. Call button by door L. U. E. Switch for electric lights R. of door in F. For use in second and third acts, a sliding panel should be made in wall L. of mantel. All furniture should be colonial in style. The subjects of the paintings should be in old-fashioned costumes. If possible, old-style chandelier or side lights. Christmas decorations if desired.*

At rise, stage is well illuminated and clear.

Enter MRS. SHERMAN, RITA, RUTH and ALICE at R. of C. in F., MRS. SHERMAN in advance.

MRS. SHERMAN (*advancing to chair at C, followed by ALICE*). Lights all on for us. Are you too tired, girls, for a cup of chocolate?

RITA (*throwing coat on hassock R. U. E.*). Too tired? Do we look it?

RUTH. Too tired? That's just your pretty, tactful way of saying, "Hungry again, girls?"

-

ALICE (*as MRS. SHERMAN attempts to unfasten her coat*). May I help you? (*Unfastens the coat and lays it on piano.*)

MRS. S. Thank you, Alice. Ruth, dear, will you ring for Hannah? (*RUTH touches call button by door L. U. E. and throws her coat on sofa.*) And Rita, are you clever enough to resurrect a bit of fire? (*RITA takes poker and stirs up fire.*) Your chaperone will rest now, an it please you. (*Seats herself in chair at C.*)

Enter HANNAH, L. U. E.

MRS. S. Hannah, will you make us some of your good chocolate? (*Looks around.*) There are four of us and Miss Betty will be here in a moment.

HANNAH. Yes, Mrs. Sherman. (*Exit L. U. E.*)

RITA (*warming her hands at fire*). This is some Christmas day! 'Twixt the holly berry and everybody's nose there is no difference.

ALICE (*seating herself on piano bench and throwing her coat beside her*). Why don't you say lips instead of nose—it's so much more poetical.

RUTH (*crossing to window R. U. E. and raising shade*). Hasn't it been a Christmas-y Christmas? Lovely crunchy snow, frosty air, sleighbells—

Enter BETTY, R. of C. in F.

BETTY. Communing with nature, Ruth, or merely counting the stars? Or (*tragically*) can it be that you were spying upon Jack and me?

MRS. S. Why didn't Jack come in for a cup of chocolate?

BETTY (*crossing to RITA at fireplace*). Dear Auntie, how could he know of such midnight dissipation? Anyway, I thought it was time for him to go.

RUTH (*coming to chair R. 2 E. and seating herself*). So, I suppose he went—

BETTY (*languidly sinking into desk chair and slipping her coat from her shoulders*). A soldier's first duty is obedience.

RITA (*crossing room and dragging hassock down R. toward C.*). Well, Betty, it has been one grand, glorious engagement party. I'd be the cockiest girl in America if I

could be so launched upon the sea of matrimony. (*Throws coat from hassock to back of chair R. 2 E. and seats herself on hassock.*)

BETTY. Dear child, your figure of speech is poor. "Launched upon the sea of matrimony" might appeal to the prospective wife of a naval officer, but it doesn't make a hit with anyone who intends to marry an army man.

RITA. Well, then, how does "Plunged upon the battlefield" do?

BETTY. Savors too much of domestic warfare. Try again.

RITA. My, but you're hard to please.

BETTY. Why shouldn't I be? It's no small responsibility to live up to a man who has more virtues even than brass buttons. (*Holds out hand and flashes her engagement ring.*)

MRS. S. (*laughingly*). My dear, my dear, do you realize that every engaged girl since the beginning of time has given the world this very sentiment, expressed in different words?

BETTY. Oh, no, Auntie; you're mistaken. No other engaged girl has ever had such an inspiration for rhapsodies.

RUTH (*shrugging her shoulders*). Just you wait. Brass buttons tarnish.

BETTY (*composedly*). Not to such an extent that they can't be polished up.

ALICE. And if you don't mind my saying so, mere sins of omission would rather get on my nerves.

BETTY. You prefer one of commission, I suppose. Well, at present I should too—at least the military commission that has its origin in Washington. For just as soon as that comes—presto, change—we jump upon the honeymoon express and dash away into the Land of Connubial Bliss.

RITA (*groaning*). More figures of speech. My head is reeling from them.

BETTY. And my feet are still keeping time to that last delicious dance. (*Rises and rushes to MRS. SHERMAN.*) Up, Auntie. Hie you to the piano and we'll have a final whirl in honor of the day! (*MRS. SHERMAN protests but is dragged by all four to the piano. She strikes up a spirited*

tune and the four girls engage in a gay modern dance which is interrupted by the entrance of HANNAH, L. U. E., with a tea cart bearing chocolate pot, cups and saucers and napkins.)

MRS. S. (*reseating herself at C.*). Hannah, you've saved the day—or is it night? For something to drink is the only thing that will settle this mad crowd.

RITA. Something to drink usually has the opposite effect I've been told. Beware, my friends, of too much Christmas spirit. (*The girls seat themselves as before. HANNAH wheels cart R. of MRS. SHERMAN, passes the chocolate and then, at a nod from MRS. SHERMAN, withdraws L. U. E.*)

ALICE (*after a pause*). Oh, I just hate to go to bed!

RUTH. Who dares to say anything about bed?

ALICE. Well, we're obliged to go *sometime*, aren't we?

RUTH. I don't want to think that this day can ever end. It's been just one succession of wonderful events ever since we emptied our stockings early this morning.

ALICE. All due to our hostesses. Any particular joy that Betty doesn't think of, Mrs. Sherman *does*.

MRS. S. That's prettily said, Alice. Will you allow the hostesses to say that seldom have they had such inspiration for their efforts?

ALICE. That's prettily said, too.

RITA. This house is a delight to me—something new and interesting each day. Why, I can scarcely close my unworthy eyes in sleep for looking at my particular bed. Imagine sleeping with the hours carved above your head, festoons of poppies at your feet and two dear cherubs for foot posts—one with finger on mouth to represent silence, the other holding an hour glass to remind you that *tempus fugit*.

MRS. S. A Florentine bed. It has been in the family since the beginning of time.

RUTH. There's a real Chippendale desk in my room.

BETTY. Belonged to a literary ancestor, dear. She wrote such gems as "Lines on a Fallen Leaf" and "After Dancing with A. B. C."

ALICE. Well, I wouldn't trade the little old-fashioned worktable in *my* room for all of that. It has brass snuffers—

MRS. S. And was the property of my grandmother. If you peep into the little drawer, you'll find the thimble she used when fashioning all the dainty bits that went into her wedding chest.

RITA (*rising and walking toward mantel*). Everything has a history—that's what makes it all so thrilling. Why, I suppose even this candlestick has been soaked with associations. (*Takes candlestick from mantel.*)

BETTY. More likely with candle grease.

MRS. S. Those identical candlesticks, Rita, were used by Lafayette when he passed the night at the home of our Revolutionary ancestor.

BETTY. Notice that we say our Revolutionary ancestor—singular number. Most of our progenitors were hot, peppery, old-fashioned Tories, and this particular patriot stands forth "fair as a star, when only one is shining in the sky."

RUTH (*rising and placing cup and saucer on tea cart*). The old mirror is my favorite. (*Goes to mirror above table.*) I wonder how many belles of ancient days it has reflected.

BETTY. Lots of 'em—our family has always been fond of primping.

ALICE. The lady above the mantel is downright magnificent. She takes my breath away.

BETTY. Quite so. She took away her husband's, too. When he came to die he had no fear of the King of Terrors—he had lived with the Queen too long.

MRS. S. (*reprovingly*). Betty! Betty! What will the girls think! Alice, the lady in question simply lived ahead of her time and was correspondingly assertive, efficient and—we must admit it—domestically tyrannical. Her youngest son came to America and founded this branch of the family. (*Places cup on tea cart.*)

RITA (*placing cup and saucer on tea cart*). Whose picture is above the desk? (*Seats herself R. 2 E.*)

BETTY. That is the youngest son, previously mentioned. He was a gay old sport according to reports. Slew Indians by the ten thousands, burned witches with impunity, was

a terror of the road on week days and a pillar of the church on the Sabbath.

MRS. S. Betty, stop your nonsense and ring for Hannah.

BETTY (*rising*). But I like him just the same—for he had the courage of his convictions and established his rights in this new world. (*Pushes button*). I like men who accomplish things—who fight for what they want—who stand for real principles—who—(*hesitates*)

ALICE. Wear brass buttons.

BETTY. Exactly. How did you guess it?

RUTH (*seating herself on hassock*). Don't stop the illustrated lecture, but tell me about *her*. (*Points to picture above sofa.*)

BETTY (*curtsying*). Allow me to introduce Elizabeth Drew, my great-great-grandmother, of whom I am the unworthy namesake. Step up ladies and gentlemen, and take a closer view.

Enter HANNAH L. U. E. She takes BETTY's extended cup, also ALICE's and places them on the tea-cart, lingering as she does so.

RITA (*enthusiastically*). Isn't it delicious? All that you need to make everything quite perfect is a ghost—oh yes, and a secret passage.

MRS. S. Suppose we tell you that we have them both.

RITA (*clasping her hands*). Really?

BETTY. Every well regulated family has a ghost, although I believe it's usually called the skeleton in the closet.

RITA. But a *real* ghost—a *real* secret passage—

MRS. S. And a real story! (*Glances at HANNAH, who stands back of her.*) Suppose we have Hannah tell us about it.

RUTH (*rising and pushing HANNAH on hassock*). A story—a story! Sit right here. (*As HANNAH resists.*) Oh, you must—you *must*! (*HANNAH glances inquiringly at MRS. SHERMAN.*)

MRS. S. (*nodding*). Yes—you *must*. It's just the story for Christmas night. (*RUTH crosses back of C. and sits on floor L. of MRS. SHERMAN.*)

RITA. But I want to hear of the *ghost*—the *secret passage* and—

BETTY (*seating herself on piano bench by ALICE*). Dear child, it is Christmas, ghost and secret passage all rolled into one—and only Hannah can describe the bargain in satisfactory terms.

HANNAH. You see, Miss Rita, my mother was house-keeper in the Drew family and her mother before her. The stories have been told me so often that it's natural for me to feel a part of them all.

MRS. S. Just as it's natural for the Drew family to feel that grandmother, mother and daughter have been very indispensable to its welfare and happiness.

HANNAH (*smoothing her apron*). It was in 1776, you remember, that—

ALICE (*interrupting*). Now, Hannah, begin with "Once upon a time"—that makes it a *real* story.

HANNAH. Well, once upon a time Mistress Elizabeth Drew lived in this very house with her mother and two sisters—and a very wilful and independent young lady she was—

RUTH (*interrupting*). Now we understand why Betty bears her name.

HANNAH. Those were Revolutionary days and families were divided against each other. Madame Drew and two of her daughters were strong Tories, but Mistress Elizabeth chose to differ and became a staunch little rebel. To make matters worse, her lover joined General Washington's forces.

RITA (*sighing*). Another soldier lover! It does run in the family.

HANNAH. The British had set the Hessians to guard Trenton and on Christmas night, 1776, there had been great carousal in the camp, for they were given to cards and drink. Washington, as you remember, chose this night to cross the Delaware and surprise the Hessians, and as a sort of spy he sent on this patriot lover of Mistress Elizabeth, who was to find the weak places in the camp of the enemy and report to the general at the moment of his landing—

ALICE. Don't tell me he was drowned—or shot, or—

BETTY. Of course not, silly. How could there be a story without the hero?

HANNAH. A Christmas ball had been given in the town, from which Madame Drew and her daughters returned very late. Hot words had been said about the patriot cause and Mistress Elizabeth was in a defiant mood. So, when a trusty little maid told her that her young lover was lurking around trying to get a glimpse of her, she forgot the danger of his being there in a Tory house, opened that door (*pointing to L. U. E.*) and called him in, while the little maid kept guard. (*She pauses, girls come closer in their interest.*) Now, John Harvey—for that was his name—was a very foolish fellow, for after he had found out what he wished to know about the Hessians and where the camp was open to attack, he would have been quite safe had he kept hidden. But no, he must get a word with his lady, and being young and very much in love, he ventured forth.

RUTH. If he hadn't we shouldn't have had the story. Go on, Hannah.

HANNAH. Hardly had he told Mistress Elizabeth of his important mission and important news and how he feared pursuit, when the little maid rushed in, shaking with fright, and declaring that the house was being watched by two Tory soldiers. Then, I have no doubt, Master Harvey realized how foolhardy he had been and how he had no right to risk his life unnecessarily when he was in his country's service. There was the clank of a sword, the sound of a footstep—(*BETTY rises noiselessly and goes to switch R. of door in F.*)—the flash of a lantern—(*BETTY turns off the lights*).

MRS. S. (*in alarm*). Why—(*turning around*) Betty!

BETTY (*raising her finger*). Sh-h-h! We are now approaching the first mention of the secret passage. We shall soon have our first news of the ghost. It is right, seemly and most appropriate that we be in utter darkness. (*Stands back of MRS. SHERMAN.*)

HANNAH. Mistress Elizabeth had to think for two. So her mind turned to the secret passage, knowing that it led to

the lower garden where the horse was tethered. In a jiffy she started him on his way, then slid back the panel into its proper place and waited. Soon came a pistol shot, another; then the sound of horses' hoofs on the smooth, hard-trodden snow, and the knowledge that the Tory soldiers were hot in pursuit.

RITA. *Then I supposed she fainted.*

HANNAH. Not Miss Elizabeth. She had too much at stake. Her lover was due to report to Washington. Suppose he had been captured, or wounded, or killed! What of the message? Without hesitation she threw a long, dark coat over her ball dress and entered the secret passage.

RITA. Bully for her—

ALICE. Oh, the story—quick, quick!

HANNAH. Well, Master Harvey was wounded and captured; but he managed to escape and arrive at headquarters a few moments after Mistress Elizabeth had given the message. Of course there was only one end to the story. So the two were wedded immediately with the good General's blessing. (*Rises.*)

RUTH. Did they live happily ever after?

HANNAH. So happily that every Christmas night their ghosts come back to this very room. (*Moves to L. U. E. with tea cart.*) And now, Mrs. Sherman, allowing me to say it, all of you should go to bed.

RITA. *Bed*, after knowing that the ghosts are here—right now? (*Looks over shoulder.*)

ALICE. Don't look so supernatural, Rita. You make the creeps go up and down my spine. Oh, do let's go to bed.

BETTY (*turning on lights and yawning*). So say we all of us.

RITA (*rising and seizing both of BETTY's hands*). Not a step! Betty, do you know where that secret passage is?

BETTY. I certainly do.

RITA. Then tell me—*this minute*—or—

BETTY. Or what?

RITA. I'll invoke the spirit of your ancestress.

BETTY. According to tradition, she's already here. You can't scare me—

RITA. Then tell me, Betty—*where* is the secret passage?
(*Looks curiously around.*)

BETTY. Tomorrow I'll demonstrate—but not tonight.

RITA. Then I'll find out for myself. I will, I *will*!

HANNAH (*at L. U. E.*). Good night, Mrs. Sherman.
Good night, young ladies.

ALL. Good night.

RUTH. And think up another story for tomorrow, Hannah. (*Exit HANNAH, L. U. E.*)

MRS. S. (*rising and taking coat from piano*). I'll let you all sleep extra late in the morning so that we may rake up for this extra dissipation.

RITA. Oh please, Mrs. Sherman—please, Betty—please, everybody—let me sleep here tonight. Why, it's a chance that will never come my way again, and I'd never forgive myself if I refused to hobnob with a ghost. Think of what I might add to science—think of the data upon spiritualism I might give to the world.

MRS. S. And think of the nervous wreck I'd have on my hands. No my dear, your rest is worth more than any traditional ghost. (*Moves around, straightens pillows, etc.*)

ALICE (*rising, taking coat and walking toward R. of C. in F.*) Anyway, there's no place to sleep.

RITA (*leaning over back of chair at C.*). This is as good as any bed.

BETTY (*taking RITA'S coat from chair at R. 2 E. and throwing it around RITA'S shoulders*). Better than your Florentine bed? Heresy!

ALICE (*turning and yawning*). Oh, hurry up! (*BETTY takes RITA by ear and marches her R. of C. in F.*)

MRS. S. (*hurrying to mantel*). Wait, Rita! (*BETTY and RITA turn. MRS. SHERMAN takes candlestick from mantel and lights it.*) As a peace offering, take Lafayette's candle and light yourself to bed. (*Hands candlestick to RITA.*)

RUTH (*rising, crossing to sofa and throwing her coat over her arm*). Wait, and let me guard the other side of the prisoner. (*Exeunt RUTH and BETTY with RITA between them, R. of C. in F.*)

MRS. S. (*with hand on electric light switch*). Ready,

Alice? (ALICE *nods and goes out R. of C. in F.*) Then out goes the light. (*Turns out light and exit R. of C. in F. Stage clear.*)

BETTY (*behind the scenes*). "How far this little candle throws its beams!" Look out for that step, Ruth. (*Sound as if climbing steps.*)

RUTH (*plaintively*). Oh, please hurry. I'm so sleepy that—(*fretfully*) stop poking me, Alice.

ALICE. Well, the ghost is poking *me*.

RUTH. Ghosts don't poke.

ALICE. And I can feel it brush past me. Ugh!

BETTY. Don't call my famous ancestress *it*. She objects and I object. Here's your door, Rita—

RITA. I—want to—sleep downstairs—

BETTY. Nay, nay, fair love. Good night and pleasant dreams. (*Sound of door being shut.*)

RUTH (*sleepily singing*) Good night, ladies! (*The others take up the strain, sing through one verse—the sound gradually dies away. Silence for a few moments.*)

Enter RITA, R. of C. in F. in fancy negligee and slippers, hair unbound, carrying the lighted candle. She peers nervously around, pulls shades down as far as possible, glances in mirror, holding the light high above her head and finally seats herself in chair at C. Once more she turns nervously around, then blows out the candle, sets the candlestick on the floor and cuddles into the chair.

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE I: *Same setting as in Act I with a few changes. An old-fashioned piano and stool, if possible, should take the place of the more modern instrument. The vase of flowers, the switch for electric lights, the call button and all modern trifles should be removed. Curtains of the colonial days should be at the windows. Lighted candles on mantel and lamps or candelabra on piano and table should furnish the light. If Christmas greens are used in both acts, the arrangement in Act II should be different from that in Act I. Stage is clear and well illuminated at rise.*

ELIZABETH enters hastily from R. of C. in F. and crosses to C., where she stands, throwing her cape to chair and defiantly pulling off her gloves. She is followed by MADAME DREW, ANNETTE and CAROLINE. ANNETTE and CAROLINE throw their long capes on sofa. MADAME DREW follows ELIZABETH to C.

ELIZABETH. No, mother, I shall never again drink a toast to His Majesty the King—never! (*Stamping foot.*) Never! I—

MADAME DREW (*angrily*). Elizabeth! (*Sinks on chair R. 2 E.*)

ELIZABETH. I couldn't be true to my conscience and propose the health of a man who has tried to crush the spirit of liberty in his own people, to dictate where he should only advise—who is a narrow, selfish tyrant—who—

ANNETTE (*rushing to ELIZABETH and placing hand over her mouth*). Hush, Elizabeth, hush! You must not say such things—you *must* be more careful or something will happen, somebody will hear—

ELIZABETH (*sarcastically*). "Something will happen, somebody will hear!" Annette, do you think I'm afraid!

CAROLINE (*angrily*). Well, you *will* be, when a red-coated soldier comes your way!

ELIZABETH (*tossing her head*). Oh, no I won't, Caroline. There'll be a blue and buff one to rescue me.

MADAME D. Elizabeth, this nonsense must stop. We have endured enough from you, and only our position as a family, together with our recognized loyalty to the king, has saved you from unpleasant situations. Fortunately people regard this attitude of yours as the harmless poise of an emotional girl.

ELIZABETH. Oh, *do* they! Then it's my duty to let them know that the poise consists of decided opinions; that—

CAROLINE (*interrupting*). Please don't disgrace us publicly again. (*Sits herself on sofa.*) Tonight, when you refused to drink the toast to the king, I could have died with mortification.

ANNETTE. It was worse than meeting the enemy. (*Flops on the piano stool.*)

ELIZABETH. The only enemy that *you* fear, my dear sister, is, "What will people say?"

MADAME D. Public opinion is not to be scorned. Elizabeth, you are the daughter of a house whose loyalty to royal word has been traditional; whose every association has been identical with that of the mother country. You are making no requital when you pledge your adherence to a rebellious faction.

ELIZABETH (*kneeling by her*). Mother, can't you understand that it is a question of *principles* with me?

MADAME D. Principles! Nonsense. You should have no principles contrary to those of your family.

CAROLINE. You should have no allegiance to anyone save the King!

ELIZABETH (*rising*). The King (*Scornfully.*) *The King!* Let him be careful or he'll forfeit the name. Tyranny cost one monarch his head; another his throne. (*Advances to C.*)

ANNETTE (*whispering*). Hush! Someone may be listening.

ELIZABETH. Who cares? I've nothing to be ashamed of.

CAROLINE (*spitefully*). But *we* have.

ELIZABETH (*turning*). Meaning—me?

CAROLINE. Meaning—you. It is not reasonable to suppose that we enthuse over your conduct.

ANNETTE. And we are not particularly proud of your admiration for a fanatical crowd that is too narrow-minded and mercenary to pay an ordinary tax to its mother country.

ELIZABETH. Do you think for a moment that a paltry forty thousand pounds a year is at stake?

CAROLINE. Then what is it, pray?

ELIZABETH. The right of petition, the privilege of self-taxation, the liberties of popular assemblies. (*Leans on back of chair.*)

MADAME D. Fiddlesticks! It all results in one thing—disloyalty and rebellion to the King.

ELIZABETH (*turning*). No, mother. At the beginning of the trouble the King had no more loyal subjects than those in America. Had he recognized the fundamental principles of English liberty—

MADAME D. (*rising and pulling down curtain at window R. U. E.*). You're talking like a book. What are the "fundamental principles of English liberty," as you call them?

ELIZABETH. The substance as well as the form of self-government.

CAROLINE (*scornfully*). And do you think that this handful of untrained men can stand against the disciplined troops of the British?

ELIZABETH. Wait and see.

ANNETTE (*petulantly*). We are waiting. The result will be that the rebels will be placed under heavier penalties for their insubordination, and that those who have been loyal to the King will profit thereby.

ELIZABETH. Again I say, wait and see.

ANNETTE. Again I say, we *are* waiting.

CAROLINE. Lexington and Concord have meant nothing to the provincial cause.

ELIZABETH (*ironically*). The British made a splendid retreat. The Americans could hardly keep up with them.

ANNETTE. And surely, Bunker Hill was a British victory.

ELIZABETH. It's a great thing, of course, to win from adversaries who have no ammunition.

MADAME D. (*coming down R. to R. 2 E.*). What can you say of Long Island—White Plains? Why, the Colo-

nists' cause is already doomed. Their general has been forced to retreat into Pennsylvania; their troops are already dwindling; it is merely a matter of days until they surrender.

ELIZABETH. Washington is not yet beaten, nor is he wholly discouraged. If you don't mind my repeating it, wait and see.

MADAME D. It's such a forlorn hope. It will mean nothing but humiliation for all those concerned. Don't be foolish, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. Just what is it that you wish me to do?

ANNETTE. Stop talking, for one thing.

MADAME D. (*laying hand on ELIZABETH'S arm*). Insure your position in royalist society by severing all interest in this mistaken rebellion.

CAROLINE (*sharply*). Give up John Harvey.

ELIZABETH. And why?

ANNETTE. He isn't your equal.

ELIZABETH. His family is quite as good as ours; a little better, if facts be known.

MADAME D. His enlistment in the Colonial army has forfeited all right to family ties. (*Sits herself at C.*)

ELIZABETH. There are many to dispute that point, mother. As a trusty aide to General Washington, he is quite living up to family traditions, I think.

CAROLINE. Well, the question is, will you give him up?

ELIZABETH. To that and all other requests of a similar nature—most decidedly, *no!*

ANNETTE (*rising*). Oh, I'm so tired. War, war—everything war! Our town guarded by a lot of Hessians—

ELIZABETH (*interrupting*). Who have been hired by the British—(*scornfully*) *hired!*

CAROLINE. It isn't fair—it isn't fair! Soldiers instead of suitors, bugles instead of serenades, drills instead of—

ANNETTE. Minuets! Come, let's have one. (*Seizes CAROLINE and pulls her to her feet.*) Just to drive away the thought and talk and worry of it all. (*Turning.*) Elizabeth, will you play for us?

ELIZABETH. I'm in no mood for music. (*Crosses and stands at side of piano.*)

ANNETTE. Then, mother. (*MADAME DREW protests.*) Oh, you must; you must! (*ANNETTE and CAROLINE force her to piano stool.*) And (*glancing at ELIZABETH*), be sure that you weave into the music the strains of "God save the King!"

CAROLINE and ANNETTE dance a stately minuet. ELIZABETH silently watches them. Just before the end of the dance, WENONAH, an Indian maid, appears in the doorway R. of C. in F. and stands irresolute, unseen by all save ELIZABETH. ELIZABETH, seeing her, starts forward, but WENONAH lays a finger upon her lips in token of silence and quietly withdraws.

MADAME D. (*rising from piano*). Not another note, girls. We're all tired and surely you've had enough dancing for one night. To bed, all of you. (*CAROLINE and ANNETTE listlessly take their coats from sofa and go slowly out of door R. of C. in F., yawning and talking together.*)

ELIZABETH. I'll put out the lights mother.

Enter WENONAH, R. of C. in F.

ELIZABETH. Here's Wenonah, and she'll help me.

MADAME D. (*seeing WENONAH*). Why are you up, Wenonah? Surely your mistress can do without you on this particular night.

ELIZABETH (*hastily*). It's Wenonah's pleasure to wait for me. Perhaps she wants to hear about the ball.

MADAME D. Hasten, then, and be sure that the windows are fastened. There are many marauding soldiers these nights and one can't be too particular. Good-night, Elizabeth, and think carefully over what has been said to you. (*Exit R. of C. in F.*)

(*ELIZABETH stands motionless for a few moments until all is still, then seizes WENONAH and draws her to C.*)

ELIZABETH. Wenonah, what is it?

WENONAH. He waits—there. (*Points outside.*)

ELIZABETH (*excitedly*). He—John? No, you are mistaken.

WENONAH (*shaking head*). No—he—wait. He say put light in window when alone. (ELIZABETH *seizes candle from mantel and rushes to window. She is about to place it in window, when WENONAH catches her arm.*) No—danger. I tell him—I bring him—(*inquiringly*) here?

ELIZABETH (*replacing candle on mantel*). Here, Wenonah—here. Quickly—quickly. (*Exit WENONAH, L. U. E.*)

In a few moments she reappears, ushering in JOHN HARVEY, wearing a long army cape, high boots and a hat pulled over his eyes.

ELIZABETH (*holding out hands*). John—John!

JOHN (*throwing off hat and rushing to her*). Betty! Oh, it's worth a thousand risks just to see you again; just to hear your voice—just to know that it's you!

ELIZABETH (*anxiously*). A thousand risks, John. What do you mean? Are you in danger?

JOHN. A man is seldom out of danger these days, Betty. I'm just in a little more deeply tonight—that's all.

ELIZABETH. You mean—

JOHN. I've been followed.

ELIZABETH (*going to WENONAH, who is standing L. U. E.*). Wenonah, watch outside—watch carefully. Keep hidden, and if you see a soldier—a *soldier*, Wenonah—or a stranger, come back and let us know. Do you understand?

WENONAH. I—understand. (*Exit L. U. E.*)

ELIZABETH (*pushing JOHN in chair at C.*). Sit there. Rest while you can. (*Drags hassock from R. U. E. beside him and seats herself*). Now, tell me all. Why are you here? Why—

JOHN. I must tell you quickly, for there is only a moment. Washington is crossing the Delaware now and he will attack the Hessians' camp early this morning. He sent me on to find the weak places in the defence of the camp. I am to report to him upon his landing.

ELIZABETH. He sent *you*—he trusted you that much!

JOHN. The Hessians are in the midst of high carousal. The camp is carelessly guarded. (*Takes paper from pocket and points as he explains.*) See here—and here—and *here* an attacking army might easily enter and as easily overwhelm. (*ELIZABETH takes the paper and closely examines it.*) It is our chance—our chance—and we must not fail.

ELIZABETH. You said you were followed.

JOHN. I was; but they've lost my trail. One would hardly look for a Continental soldier in a Tory house, I'm thinking.

ELIZABETH. Oh, I wish it were not a Tory house, John. I truly do.

JOHN. You're a brave little rebel, Betty, and I know you have many battles to fight these days.

ELIZABETH. Oh, I do, John. I do. They can't understand.

JOHN (*quickly*). They can't accept your standard—and they won't accept me. Is that it? (*ELIZABETH nods.*) Are you sorry, Betty, that you've championed our cause—that you've cast your lot with mine?

ELIZABETH (*proudly*). Sorry? Sorry, when I know I'm on the side of right? When just having you has made me the proudest and happiest girl in the United—States—that—is—to—be?

JOHN (*bending over her*). Betty—Betty!

ELIZABETH. Is everything so desperate as they tell me? Is the enemy so strong?

JOHN. We've had dark days, Betty, but brighter ones are coming, and nothing is impossible with General Washington at our head. Think of him now, crossing that frozen river—dauntless amid discouragements and dangers that would crush any other man.

ELIZABETH. And trusting *you* to help him in this great move. Oh, I'm proud, John; very proud. (*Looks at paper.*) *This* means much to him, doesn't it?

JOHN. It means almost the certainty of victory.

Enter WENONAH, L. U. E.

ELIZABETH (*rising*). Wenonah, what is it?

WENONAH (*in terror*). Horses down there. (*Pointing.*) Soldiers around house—listening—watching.

JOHN (*rising*). They've tracked me. I'm sorry, Betty. It's hard on you and I should never have risked this chance of seeing you.

ELIZABETH. Oh, John, it's of you I'm thinking—you and the message.

JOHN (*grimly*). Not for a moment will I fail, Betty. My honor is at stake. The country is in need, and nothing shall stop me. (*Takes hat and prepares to go L. U. E.*)

ELIZABETH (*catching his arm*). John, you can't go that way. It will mean death to you. Wait. Let me think. (*Suddenly.*) Where is your horse?

JOHN. Down in the garden.

ELIZABETH (*excitedly*). Then I can save you! I can save you! Look! (*Rushes to mantel, touches spring and slides back the panel, revealing secret passage.*) This is the secret passage of our house. It leads to the garden. Here (*places lighted candle in JOHN's hand*), follow the path—it will take you to the summer house. They will not be watching for you there. You can make your escape. Oh, hurry, hurry! (*JOHN enters passage.*)

JOHN (*turning*). Bless you, Betty—and goodbye!

ELIZABETH. Goodbye, John—goodbye. (*Shuts panel.*) Watch, Wenonah, watch. (*Exit WENONAH, L. U. E.*)

There is a tense silence for several moments. Then a pistol shot rings out—another and still another. WENONAH rushes in from L. U. E.

WENONAH. They follow—they shoot!

ELIZABETH (*to herself*). If they wound him, if they capture him, what of the message? (*Glances at paper which she still holds in her hand.*) The General must know. John's honor must be saved. The country must not suffer. (*Suddenly.*) Wenonah, my coat. (*Pointing to R. of C. in F.*) There—the long black one. (*Exit WENONAH R. of C. in F., returning almost immediately with coat. ELIZABETH throws it around herself, places paper in her bodice, takes the other candle from the mantel.*)

Come, Wenonah! (*Enters secret passage followed by WENONAH. The panel slides back.*)

(*Here the curtain is lowered for a moment to indicate the passing of a few hours.*)

SCENE II. *The same as Scene I. At rise, MADAME DREW is seated at R. 2 E. with sewing. CAROLINE is reclining upon sofa. ANNETTE is at piano. Stage brightly illuminated, since it is noon.*

CAROLINE (*sitting upright*). Do stop that strumming, Annette. My head is fairly splitting.

ANNETTE. Due to the frequency with which you drank the King's health last night. Don't blame the music.

MADAME D. (*reprovingly*). Due also to the late hour at which you ceased your frivolity.

ANNETTE (*turning on piano stool*). Early hour, you mean, mother.

CAROLINE (*rising and strolling to window R. U. E.*). Did you hear the shots last night?

ANNETTE (*yawning*). Which shots? Any different from the shots we're hearing all the time?

CAROLINE. Different in that they were close at hand.

ANNETTE (*carelessly*). The Hessians were target practicing, perhaps.

CAROLINE (*ironically*). At the dead of night? Very likely.

MADAME D. Hot in pursuit of an escaped soldier, I suspect.

ANNETTE. The *pursuit* is a possible thing; but I argue any kind of *hotness* on a Christmas night in New Jersey.

MADAME D. What a blessing it is that our home is out of Trenton. These two or three miles take us far from the reminders of war.

CAROLINE. And, incidentally, from the unpleasant necessity of looking at the Hessians. (*Shudders.*) Ugh! How I hate them.

ANNETTE. I'd never admit it to Elizabeth, but I *do* think that England might have managed to fight without the help of *hired* soldiers.

MADAME D. Speaking of Elizabeth, it's time for her to be up. There's no excuse for such late hours.

CAROLINE. She's probably angry over what we said last night.

ANNETTE. More likely that she's out on one of her long tramps.

MADAME D. She hasn't breakfasted. I've inquired. (*Rising.*) I'll send Wenonah to waken her.

CAROLINE. Oh, no you won't. Wenonah has departed—nobody knows where.

MADAME D. Nonsense! I left her with Elizabeth last night. They were about to put out the lights.

ANNETTE. Put out the lights? Why, the housemaid found the lamps still burning this morning, and the candles flickering in their sockets.

MADAME D. (*going toward mantel*). That's strange—very strange.

CAROLINE. It isn't strange that Wenonah has left, if that's what you mean. Even her devotion to Elizabeth couldn't draw her entirely from her Indian life.

MADAME D. But to go—without a word. (*Stands by mantel.*)

ANNETTE (*rising*). That's the Indian of it. Still, she may be back by night time. Who knows? (*Goes to CAROLINE, R. U. E.*)

MADAME D. (*sternly*). I shall waken Elizabeth myself. (*Exit R. of C. in F.*)

ANNETTE. What do you find in the landscape that's so absorbing? (*Puts arm about CAROLINE's shoulder.*)

CAROLINE. Something must have happened in the town. Such passing and repassing on the road—soldiers, townspeople and—

ANNETTE. What a pity we're no nearer. It's tantalizing not to know. (*Peers out window.*)

CAROLINE. Shall we send a servant to find out? Or do you feel like playing spy?

Enter MADAME DREW, hastily, R. of C. in F.

MADAME D. (*in agitation*). She's not there—she's not there! (*Advances to C. hurriedly.*)

ANNETTE (*crossing and standing R. of MADAME DREW*). Now, mother, there's nothing to make you so excited. Elizabeth doubtless has gone out on a morning walk.

MADAME D. But her bed has not been slept in. (*Sinks in chair at C. CAROLINE crosses back of MADAME DREW and stands at her left.*)

CAROLINE (*patting MADAME DREW's shoulder*). Before you know it she'll be walking in with some adventure to relate, some—

MADAME D. (*interrupting*). But the shots last night—the disappearance of Wenonah. Something has happened. I know it—I feel it.

ANNETTE. The shots? No, no. (*Looking at CAROLINE.*) Do you suppose—

CAROLINE. Oh, surely not.

MADAME D. How do we know but that she was carried off?

ANNETTE. Without a sound? (*Looks around.*) Without any sign of resistance? (*Shakes head.*) I can't believe *that*.

CAROLINE. And why should anyone carry off Elizabeth? (*Suddenly.*) Unless—unless—

MADAME D. (*sharply*). Unless—what?

CAROLINE. Unless her reckless talk last night about the King—

MADAME D. (*quickly*). Has caused her capture? They wouldn't dare—they wouldn't *dare*—

ANNETTE. Oh, yes, they would, mother. Anything is dared in war times.

MADAME D. (*proudly*). Not by His Majesty's soldiers!

CAROLINE. I'm not so sure of that. Soldiers are soldiers.

ANNETTE. And there is no such liberty as free speech—among the enemies of Britain.

MADAME D. (*in despair*). What are we to do?

CAROLINE. In Elizabeth's own words—wait and see.

MADAME D. *Wait?* Do nothing? When she may, even now, be a captive in the British army?

ANNETTE. Why the British?

MADAME D. (*in surprise*). What do you mean?

ANNETTE. Didn't she say that if a red-coated soldier carried her off, there'd be a blue and buff one to rescue her?

MADAME D. You mean—John Harvey?

ANNETTE. John Harvey.

CAROLINE (*excitedly*). Then it was he last night who came for her—who was fired upon—who—(*three regular taps sound*). What was that? (*Tapping continues.*)

ANNETTE (*crossing to door L. U. E.*). A servant, doubtless. (*Opens door, looks out and closes it again.*) No one here. (*Tapping continues.*)

CAROLINE. The window, perhaps. (*Goes to each window in turn.*) No. (*Tapping continues.*)

MADAME D. (*nervously*). Can it be the wind?

CAROLINE (*gazing out window*). There is no wind.

MADAME D. This is not a natural sound. (*Pauses. Tapping continues.*) It frightens me. (*Crosses L. of C.*)

ANNETTE (*listening*). It comes from that wall. (*Points toward mantel.*)

MADAME D. Impossible!

ANNETTE (*going toward mantel*). Something in the chimney, perhaps.

CAROLINE (*excitedly*). Wait—hush—let me listen. (*Tapping continues.*) That tapping comes from the secret passage.

ANNETTE. The secret passage! Someone is there. (*Inquiringly.*) Shall I open it? (MADAME DREW *nods*. ANNETTE *touches spring, the panel slides, revealing ELIZABETH, still wearing the dark coat over her ball gown.*)

MADAME D. (*hysterically*). Elizabeth!

ANNETTE. Where have you been?

MADAME D. Why have you frightened us this way?

ELIZABETH (*wearily*). Don't ask me questions. I'm so tired—so tired!

CAROLINE (*taking ELIZABETH's hand*). Come in; you're cold—you're wet—

ELIZABETH. I can't come in until I give my message.

It isn't a welcome one, but you must hear it. This morning General Washington surprised the Hessian camp, took a thousand prisoners and captured a thousand stands of arms. (*Steps inside.*)

MADAME D. It isn't true—it can't be true.

ELIZABETH. But it *is* true. I saw it. I was a part of it.

MADAME D. Explain yourself.

ELIZABETH. General Washington sent John ahead to reconnoitre, to find the weak places in the camp defence and to report before the attack.

ANNETTE. Ah, I begin to understand. He came here, didn't he? He was discovered—

ELIZABETH (*excitedly*). Then you heard the shots? (*Calming herself.*) Yes, he did come. He showed me the plan of attack, and when Wenonah warned him of pursuit, I sent him through the secret passage. (*Pauses.*)

CAROLINE (*eagerly*). And then?

ELIZABETH. I feared his capture. I feared the message would never reach headquarters. Wenonah helped me saddle my horse and I rode my fastest to General Washington.

MADAME D. (*angrily*). I shall never forgive you for this treachery, Elizabeth—*never!*

ELIZABETH. Oh, mother, you will some day—you *must!*

CAROLINE (*sarcastically*). Well, a pretty sight you are and a fine name you've made for yourself after this mad performance.

ANNETTE. All for a common spy who neglects his duty, allows himself to be taken prisoner and—

ELIZABETH. Oh, but he escaped. He rode into camp shortly after my arrival. General Washington makes much of him, trusts him, and—

MADAME D. Doubtless laughs at you for your ridiculous part in the matter—for forcing yourself into affairs that do not concern you or yours.

ELIZABETH. Mother, listen.

MADAME D. No, I'll not listen. I have been lenient with you too long, Elizabeth. Henceforth I'll see that you are far removed from the scenes of this disgraceful rebellion.

ELIZABETH. More than ever, mother, have I pledged my loyalty to the patriot cause.

MADAME D. How dare you?

ELIZABETH. For not an hour ago, with the good General as witness, I became John Harvey's wife. (*All attempt to speak.*) No; not a word—not a word! I'm too happy for reproaches. This very room is full of sweetest memories and each Christmas night in the years to come it will be haunted by the happy spirits of the two who found love, freedom and victory by way of the secret passage!

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE: *Same as Act I. Hassock is placed R. of chair at C. Stage well lighted as it is morning.*

At rise, RITA is seated at C., ALICE on hassock and RUTH R. 2 E. with embroidery.

RITA (*dramatically*). And then—I awoke!

ALICE (*sighing*). It's wonderful, Rita, perfectly wonderful! Did you really see them?

RITA. Every one—heard them talk—and almost touched them.

RUTH. That second helping to mince pie yesterday certainly gave you a large and elegant nightmare. (*Emphatically.*) That's all I have to say.

RITA. No nightmare about it. 'Twas a regular connected story.

RUTH. With cerebral excitement as its basis.

RITA. I don't know what cerebral excitement is, and whatever it is, it isn't what caused my dream. I saw all those people, I tell you. I know what they said. The memory of them is so distinct that—(*breaks off abruptly and gazes fixedly over left shoulder*).

ALICE (*nervously*). Rita, what is it? (*Rises.*)

RITA. The little Indian maid—Wenonah, they called her. (*ALICE walks to L. U. E., opens door, looks out and closes it.*

RUTH (*rising*). Where?

RITA (*still gazing into space*). Over by the door. (*Pauses and then turns to RUTH.*) 'Tis in my mind's eye, child, so don't get frightened.

RUTH. You begin to get on my nerves. (*As she is about to seat herself R. 2 E. RITA shrieks.*) Heavens! What is the matter?

RITA. You were just about to sit on Madame Drew. She is there (*pointing to chair R. 2 E.*)—with her sewing, and she isn't the kind of person one can sit on with impunity.

RUTH (*spitefully*). From all reports, it strikes me that she is the very one that needs sitting on—so here goes! (*Seats herself heavily and resumes work.*)

RITA (*looking over left shoulder at ALICE, who is coming toward C.*). Alice, Alice, you walked right over Annette's toes then and bumped into Elizabeth herself. Haven't you any respect for *real* personages?

RUTH. What about yourself. It seems quite likely that you're trespassing, too. Who sat in *that* chair? (*Points to RITA's chair.*)

RITA (*complacently*). John Harvey.

ALICE. You're not playing fair. You can't have the only man, even if he is just a ghost. Get up and give *me* a chance. (*Tries to pull RITA from chair.*)

RITA (*forcing ALICE on hassock*). No, no, Alice. You must sit just where Elizabeth sat—at my—I mean, John Harvey's feet.

ALICE (*struggling*). I sit on no man's feet! (*As RITA holds her down.*) Help! Help!

RUTH. Humor the poor lunatic, Alice. Hunks of mince pie and chunks of imagination have done their worst. She thinks she is John Harvey. (*Mockingly.*) What wouldst thou, noble youth? (*Rises and goes toward mantel.*)

RITA (*taking an imaginary paper from her gown and pointing*). See here—and here—and here—an attacking army might easily enter and as easily overwhelm.

ALICE (*shaking her head*). Alas, milord! 'Tis written in blank verse—I cannot read.

RITA (*disgustedly*). Now, who isn't playing fair? I'm doing my best to visualize the scene for you and you refuse to get into the spirit of the thing. (RUTH *strikes three resounding whacks upon the fireplace*. RITA *jumps and turns half around*.) Goodness, what was that?

RUTH (*sarcastically*). The shots. Don't you recognize them? Oh, come, now; get into the spirit of the thing.

ALICE (*mockingly*). Is't thou, Wenonah?

RUTH (*striking an attitude*). Faith, and it's the young gentleman I would be after warnin'. There's a pair of Uncle Sam soldier boys what's a trackin' him and a-howlin' bloody murder. And, beggin' your grace, sor, they're usin' bullets so reckless like that you'd best be makin' thracks or you'se a dead one!

Enter HANNAH, L. U. E., with duster.

RUTH. Holy Saint Pathrick presarve your soul!

HANNAH (*dusting sofa*). What is it, Miss Ruth—play acting?

RUTH. Only a movie, Hannah, to illustrate Rita's thrilling account of Elizabeth crossing the Delaware, or Fought, Bled and Married, All-of-a-Sudden!

RITA (*rising and going L. U. E.*). They're making fun of me and my dream. Couldn't it have been true, Hannah? Couldn't I have seen it just as it happened long time ago?

HANNAH (*pausing in work*). 'Tis the second sight—the inner eye that's been given you, Miss Rita. Only on Christmas night could the vision have come to you.

RITA. Then you don't doubt that it was *real*—that 'twas more than a dream?

HANNAH (*dusting piano*). *Doubt?* Never in the world. Time just rolled back for you and made you a very part of what happened in this room so many years ago.

RUTH (*sitting in desk chair*). Now, Hannah, do you mean to say that this imaginative child would have had this extra vision had you not told her the story beforehand?

HANNAH. It would have come to her, Miss Ruth; it

would have come. 'Twas Christmas night—the time for revelation.

ALICE. But science says—

HANNAH. Science doesn't understand everything, Miss Alice—any more than *we* do. (*Crosses back of ALICE to L. of stage and continues her dusting.*)

RITA. And science shall not spoil my beautiful dream. (*Stands before picture over sofa, back to audience.*) Isn't she lovely, Hannah? You should have seen her sweep in that door (*pointing to R. of C. in F.*), fling up her little head and stand her ground.

Enter MRS. SHERMAN, *R. of C. in F.*

MRS. S. The dream again, Rita? (*Stands by RITA and looks up at the picture.*)

RUTH. The dream, *again*? It promises to be now and forever. Don't ask her to repeat it, Mrs. Sherman, for I've heard it four times already. (*Wailing.*) Please don't let her tell it.

MRS. S. Well, it was an experience, we must admit—one of the unusual things that sometimes come to one. The "atmosphere" must have been intense, my dear, to have supplied so vivid and realistic a picture to you. (*Sits on sofa.*)

RUTH. Embryo psychic powers, I'm thinking—"seventh daughter of a seventh daughter."

ALICE. Wouldn't it be thrilling to have a clairvoyant for one's dearest friend.

RITA. Joke if you wish, dear friends, but you're jealous of my experience and you know it. (*Sits by MRS. SHERMAN.*)

RUTH. And any little scepticism which we happen to have would quickly disappear if you'd put the Q. E. D. to your proposition and touch the spring to the secret passage.

RITA. You think I don't know.

ALICE. Oh, no, we don't. We just ask you to demonstrate what you *do* know?

RITA (*emphatically*). Not till Betty comes. Not till Betty comes. How many times must I say it?

MRS. S. Betty's absence begins to worry me. I can't account for it.

RITA (*tragically*). Have you searched her room? Has her bed been slept in?

MRS. S. (*laughing*). Very much slept in. No excitement there, Rita.

ALICE. Betty isn't given to early rising.

MRS. S. That also puzzles me.

HANNAH (*pausing in her work*). But the telephone message—

MRS. S. (*in surprise*). The telephone message?

HANNAH. Weren't you told? The message came early this morning. Miss Betty snatched a piece of toast, drank a cup of coffee and rode to town before the rest of you were up.

MRS. S. Oh, so that's it. Then we need worry no longer, for it's quite evident that Jack was at the other end of the wire. (*Exit HANNAH R. of C. in F.*)

ALICE (*sighing*). It must be heavenly to be in love.

MRS. S. But a great trial to the families of the parties involved.

RITA (*thoughtfully*). Has there ever been any opposition to Jack?

MRS. S. (*in surprise*). *Opposition?* Why, no. What made you ask?

RUTH. Dear Mrs. Sherman, she wants Betty to elope through that secret passage and rival the escapade of her ancestor.

MRS. S. (*laughing*). You funny child. I fear that your romantic soul must do without the extras this time. In Betty's own forceful language, we "fell" for Jack at first sight.

RITA. What a shame! His being a socialist or a raving anarchist would certainly have added local color.

ALICE. And Betty would have defied opposition and ridden away on his motorcycle with the same spirit that animated the Elizabeth of other days.

MRS. S. Alas, I fear that nothing but the conventional wedding is in store for Betty—with the usual sequence

of rice and old shoes. (*Three knocks sound.*) Come in!
(*Pause.*) Why, I heard a knock.

ALICE. So did I. (*Tapping continues.*)

MRS. S. I'll open the door. (*Rises and goes L. U. E., opens door, looks out and closes door.*) There's nothing here. (*Tapping continues.*)

RUTH (*jumping up*). Maybe it's Betty at the window. (*Rushes to each window in turn and looks out.*) No. (*Stands by window R. U. E.*)

MRS. S. (*coming down L.*). Perhaps it's the wind.

RUTH (*looking out*). But there is no wind. (*Tapping continues. Meanwhile RITA has risen in great excitement.*)

RITA (*clasping her hands*). It's—it's in the secret passage.

RUTH. There you go again. Are you sure that you know where the secret passage is? (*Tapping continues.*)

RITA (*excitedly*). Oh, it is from the secret passage—it is. (*Seizing MRS. SHERMAN.*) Mrs. Sherman, tell them that I'm right.

MRS. S. Let me listen. (*Pause. Tapping continues.*) It certainly comes from that direction. (*With excitement.*) Oh, I wonder if it could be so—if anyone would use it!

RITA. May I open it? *Now?* And test the revelation of the dream? (*MRS. SHERMAN nods, RITA touches spring, the panel slides, revealing BETTY in riding suit.*)

ALL. Betty! (*MRS. SHERMAN and RITA stand L.*)

RUTH (*coming toward R. of mantel*). Where have you been?

BETTY. Down in the city with Jack. He telephoned for me. I thought you knew.

ALICE. Why did you come—*this* way? (*Points to passage.*)

BETTY. Didn't I say that I'd reveal its whereabouts to-day? (*ALICE joins RUTH R. of mantel.*) Well, I've kept my promise. (*Steps inside.*)

RUTH. Suppose there had been no one here to release you, you harum-scarum thing!!

BETTY. Then I should have gone back the way I came.

RITA (*impressively*). But someone *was* here.

BETTY. And doubtless Auntie touched the spring with proper dignity.

MRS. S. But Auntie *didn't*.

BETTY. Then who did?

MRS. S. Rita.

BETTY (*in surprise*). Rita! How could she?

RITA. I had a dream, Betty—a perfectly wonderful dream. (*Comes close to BETTY and starts to tell her.*)

BETTY (*interrupting*). And you're going to tell me all about it—some other time, my dear. I'm not dealing in dreams today—(*rapturously*) only in glorious realities.

RUTH. Betty! Something's happened.

BETTY. Everything's happened! The sun, moon and stars have changed their courses—the bottom of the world's dropped out and I'm just beginning to live!

MRS. S. Why, Betty!

BETTY. I'll give you three guesses.

RITA (*eagerly*). Washington has surprised the Hessians and has taken a thousand prisoners and has captured a thousand stands of arms. (*BETTY stares at her in amazement.*)

RUTH. Don't mind her. She's as crazy as you.

MRS. S. (*suddenly*). Betty—Betty—has Jack received his commission?

BETTY. Auntie guessed right the very first time. It came this morning, and he goes tonight. (*Joyfully.*) He goes tonight!

ALICE. Betty, you are crazy. How can you smile when he is going?

BETTY. Because—I'm going with him!

MRS. S. (*anxiously*). Betty, what do you mean?

BETTY (*rushing to* MRS. SHERMAN). Oh, Auntie, I'm a harum-scarum thing, but you'll be good to me, won't you? (*Puts arm around* MRS. SHERMAN'S *neck.*) I met Jack this morning. When he told me the commission had come, I couldn't let him go. I couldn't say *no* to his pleadings—so—(*she hesitates*) so—I married him this morning! (*Waves her hand displaying wedding ring, then turns and faces picture over sofa.*) Oh, you dear lady of other days!

(*Kisses her hand to the picture.*) I know now just how you felt—it's in the blood, I'm thinking—and I've brought the self-same message in the self-same way, on the self-same morning! (*As they gather around her.*) Not a word—not a word! Jack will help me explain. (*Breaks away, rushes to secret passage and turns.*) He's waiting. Shall I bring him to you by way of the secret passage?

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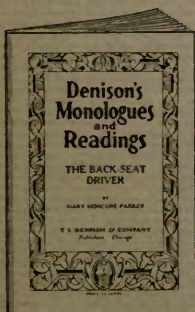
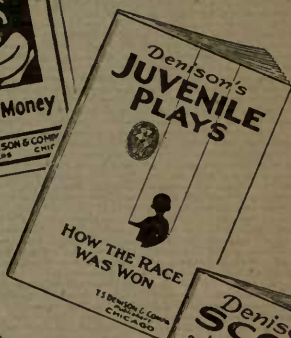
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